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The Empire Strikes Back, An Interview With Grzegorz Kostrzewa-Zorbas

from the book *A Blow From the Left*
by Jacek Kurski and Piotr Semka

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FOREWORD

The following incisive and revealing interview raises important questions and seriously reassesses some of the policies conducted by both the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Polish national leadership during the first years of the post-Communist era in Poland. Mr. Grzegorz Kostrzewa-Zorbas, one of the prominent Solidarity underground activists who focused on foreign policy issues during the 1980's and one of the first to be appointed as a non-Communist to the ministry, depicts the unusual complexity of foreign policy issues he helped to initiate and implement while serving in senior-level positions from 1990-1991.

Some of Poland's most innovative foreign policies in the post-Communist era stemmed from the work Mr. Kostrzewa-Zorbas conducted during his tenure. His initiatives to shape the two-track Eastern policy and the Warsaw-Prague-Budapest security relationship within the Visegrad Triangle deserve special attention. These policies brought Poland to the forefront of change in the former Eastern bloc and accelerated independent Poland's quest to construct an entirely new relationship to the East and to integrate into the West, NATO and the European Union. Both the two track Eastern policy and the cooperative Visegrad Triangle provided like-minded Czechoslovak and Hungarian policymakers the ability to coordinate some of the most important immediate post-Communist foreign policies, namely to dismantle the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and to negotiate new relationships based heavily on their own terms with Moscow.

As Mr. Kostrzewa-Zorbas portrays in the following interview, his policies often faced stubborn and hostile Communist bureaucratic opposition. This not only occurred in Poland, but also throughout the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It was Mr. Kostrzewa-Zorbas and his young non-Communist policy team, under the Minister of Foreign Affairs Krzysztof

Skubiszewski, who attempted to change Polish policies and enable the newly independent country to begin the long road of integrating into Western security structures.

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FROM THE BOOK *A BLOW FROM THE LEFT*

by Jacek Kurski and Piotr Semka
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Grzegorz Kostrzewa-Zorbas was born in 1958. From 1985 to 1989 he was editor-in-chief of the underground publication, *Nowa Koalicja (New Coalition)*, devoted to international politics with particular emphasis placed on Central Europe and the European nations of the USSR. In the eighties he published under the name of Marcin Mieguszowiecki, and his work appeared in *Tygodnik Mazowsze (Mazowsze Weekly)*, *Wiezi (Ties)*, *Kontakt (Contact)* in Paris, and *Rzeczpospolita Polska (Polish Republic)* in London, among other publications. From June 1, 1990 until November 1991 he was deputy director of the European Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From December 1, 1991, to the end of March 1992 he was Director of the Planning and Analysis Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From November 1990 until June of 1991 he served as the Chairman of the Polish delegation negotiating withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Poland. From April to July 1992 he served as the first director of the Bureau for Defense Policy of the Ministry of National Defense. He voted for Lech Walesa in both presidential elections.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

An interview with Grzegorz Kostrzewa-Zorbas

Before you left the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a year ago, you led the delegation negotiating the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Poland. On November 15, 1992 the last soldier of the former USSR left our country. Aren't you satisfied?

Gentlemen, you must be joking! Combat units of the Red Army have left Poland, but six thousand signal troops and troops that are supposed to provide security during passage from Germany will stay in our country until the end of 1993.

But what's six thousand compared to fifty thousand? Aren't you exaggerating?

It is not important how many of them are here. Foreign militaries are present in Poland, and this is a strategic fact. I remember seeing military maps at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels. For an entire year Poland will still be marked with diagonal red lines--just like Russia. Czechoslovakia and Hungary are clean. All Poles, including you and me--are wearing those red stripes. How can we be certain that these six thousand people are not Spetsnaz, GRU, electronic intelligence or other "interesting" services?

Why is it strange that the Russians want to provide security for their own troops during transit from Germany?

There is no indication that anyone will threaten them in Poland. This selectiveness, i.e., pulling out combat units first and then signal units, was not the case in Czechoslovakia or Hungary. The hypocrisy of the Soviets and those who signed this agreement with them is that there is practically no transit, only a thin, irregularly flowing stream. Withdrawal from Germany is carried out mainly via the Baltic Sea. The only trains that run through Poland are the ones that have been servicing Soviet bases in Germany for years.

How can you say that those few Soviets stationed in Poland...

There are only a few, but they are a select few. There is a huge Russian signal unit stationed in Rembertow on the outskirts of Warsaw--fifteen kilometers from the main buildings of Polish government! And Rembertow is not even located on any transit route.

So, how can those "select" few avert us from the process of integrating with the West? There are 250,000 Soviet soldiers in Germany, and that does not interfere with Germany's membership in NATO. Germany is already in NATO and does not have to make any efforts. The presence of the Soviet Army is limited to the new territories and not spread all over country, as in Poland. In spite of that, the eastern part of Germany is not integrated with the territorial structure of NATO. For example, no NATO subordinate units are stationed there. They will be, as soon as the last Russian leaves.

So why didn't you push for the withdrawal of Russians a year or two ago, when you were conducting the negotiations? I conducted them only up to a certain time. If we had had a clever and decisive policy, there wouldn't have been a single Russian soldier left in Poland a year ago. Just as there are none left in Czechoslovakia or Hungary. When we gave up on such a policy I lost all hope for change within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and for the introduction of our own policy towards the East. I left.

Did you believe in Skubiszewski before then?

Unfortunately, I did.

"JUST US AND THE MILITARY..."

I started work at the building on Szuch Avenue on June 1, 1990, at the time when Skubiszewski had begun making changes in the Ministry. Only then did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

question the "round table agreements," abolish departments built on ideology, and remove the vice-minister representing the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) from his position. In addition to Skubiszewski and Vice-Minister Makarczyk, I was the third new person to come to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As the deputy director of the Department for European Affairs, I was to create a new policy towards the East.

Are you claiming that the first communist wasn't removed from the top level position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until half a year after the break-up of the Polish United Workers' Party?

That should be no surprise. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (along with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of National Defense) were among those ministries which the "round table" accords had left to the decisive control of the post-Communists. It was supposed to be like this: Skubiszewski alone, as the only man outside the establishment, and that was it. Our first vice-minister, mentioned earlier Boleslaw Kulski from PZPR, was supposed to guarantee the continuity of our politics toward the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

The wall came down, the velvet revolution triumphed, and the relations with countries that were breaking free from communism were handled by a communist?

Yes. Havel had already been president for half a year when Kulski was leaving. Mazowiecki and Skubiszewski gladly welcomed the changes in the countries breaking free from communism, but our own Ministry of Foreign Affairs could not, for some reason, liberate itself.

You were supposed to be a "needle" prodding the old system. How were you received?

The first days were the hardest. I encountered resistance from the machinery as they tried to encircle and put me in a secondary role. I had to search alone for sources of information and fight for my own field of operations. And the surrealism of this place! At the first moment I felt as though I had traveled to the Soviet Union. In the cabinet in my office I found a collection of Ceausescu's speeches and a paper weight in the shape of the TV tower in East Berlin--the only thing missing there was Lenin's little finger sealed in crystal. When I took this position I was presented with the last report pertaining to our policy towards the USSR dated May 1990. It was given to me with pride by the Department Director Mr. Makosa. It said in black and white: "The Soviet Union is the guarantee of Polish sovereignty". I crossed out that sentence and ordered a whole new report. They didn't even understand what I was asking them to do.

When did they understand?

They understood when Skubiszewski gave me a free hand in changing 100% of the department's staff because literally 100% were graduates of Moscow's diplomatic schools: the Diplomatic Academy and the MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations). You can read about MGIMO in classic books on the KGB and international espionage, e.g., by John Barron.

Why didn't you give those people a chance?

I wasn't sure who had or had not had any connections harmful to our national security. I had no way to check this and there can be no gray areas in diplomacy. When Polish national security is involved, it is not necessary to prove someone's guilt. That's why I replaced everyone. Since the spring of 1991, the entire department has been staffed with new people with roots in the former opposition. Besides, they found some minor consulate in the sticks for Makosa, I think, in Varna.

Why did you not presume their innocence?

The rule of presumed innocence applies in legal proceedings. This rule cannot govern the work of an institution that is essential to the security of the whole nation. We have to be certain on this level. Korwin-Mikke described it like this: if an airline pilot is an epileptic, then each passenger has a right to fear that it will affect him during the flight. And in such a case nobody presumes him innocent. You are welcome to check how strict the rules are for the British civil service.

Did the Polish People's Republic carry out its own foreign policy?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish People's Republic was fiction. Policy lines from Moscow were binding at that time. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was a code name for an institution whose main priority was intelligence activities. I don't know what exact number of people were involved, but a significant number of staff members of the ministry and its subsidiaries were officers of the military and security intelligence services.

What basis do you have to support that statement?

The basis is the knowledge I gained when I worked my way through piles of dossiers. In August 1990 I joined the commission that checked the backgrounds of the Ministry's employees. The more strategically important the department was, from the Eastern Bloc point of view, the higher was the percentage of agents and officers from intelligence services. The greatest number of spies was in the Department for Western Europe, but also the countries of Departments II and III, especially the USA, Canada, Japan and ASEAN countries. One of the former employees of the Polish embassy in Tokyo, when briefing me on his previous job and emphasizing the importance of their agency, said proudly: "In our embassy everything was clear--it was just us and the military... ."

And by that you mean?

That the embassy staff in Tokyo consisted exclusively of the military intelligence and the Ministry of Internal Affairs officers.

Did Skubiszewski know who among his staff held "a second job"? No, there is no information about any intelligence service affiliation in the personnel files at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But in many cases we were able to figure out who was who just from reviewing the course of their professional careers, biographies, and the whole contents of personnel files. Some of the intelligence officers who served the former system did not pass the process of verification at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and didn't make it to the intelligence branch of the Office for State Security [Urząd Ochrony Państwa--UOP]. Nevertheless, they still work for the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where they were "stored" at the end of eighties. One vice-minister of internal affairs, who came often to our Ministry, told me jokingly one day: "I have this feeling that at any moment someone will salute me."

Did Skubiszewski demand more information on this issue from the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs?

I know nothing about any such attempts. Some of the candidates for ambassadorships who appeared alongside Mazowiecki decided to do some checking of their personnel on their own and as a result discovered a whole "herd" of spies. As far as military intelligence--it was almost impossible. The Prime Minister's influence did not reach there.

What is so strange about military intelligence operating out of the diplomatic posts? That is practiced worldwide.

Every country needs intelligence officers within the ranks of diplomats. The West also, but that is where the similarity ends. First, in western embassies the diplomatic service dominates the intelligence. It was just the opposite with us, and that's where the basis for the pay scale for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came from. Regarding the director's complaints about the low salaries, one long-term staff member responded in a sudden wave of honesty: "Why are you surprised, Mr. Director? Who do you think lived here on only one salary?" Second, there is no doubt that the presence of the intelligence agents alone is acceptable. Of course, as long as we are sure that they serve our national interests. The verification process did not take place in the military at all. It did take place in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but there was a lot of doubt as to the validity of the whole process.

We talked about Kulski who has already been gone for two years when in fact, since August 1992, the most mysterious person in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was Vice-Minister Jan Majewski. What can you tell us about him?

Commander in the Navy, and in reality an intelligence officer of the Polish People's Republic.

Do you have any proof to support your statement?

Mr. Majewski was considered a persona non grata by the British government in the sixties and was expelled from the Polish embassy in London under suspicion of espionage. You can check this information in the British newspapers. He became the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in the mid-eighties. And when Makarczyk left office in the beginning of 1992, Majewski became the number two person in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

What was Majewski's range of responsibilities?

He was responsible for relations with non-European countries: Asia, Australia, Japan, China. He supervised arms trading and also controlled the Ministry's finances. What is very important is that American affairs were not taken away from him until the spring of 1991 as a result of a rebellion within the Polish embassy in Washington. A large group of people at the American

Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also threatened to quit in protest if Majewski stayed in control of American affairs.

Is it typical for a person fired for espionage activities then to become the vice-minister of Foreign Affairs?

It is a quite a unique practice in the world of diplomacy. Of course, only if we exclude Soviet practices from the international standards.

Why did Skubiszewski keep Majewski as his deputy until late August 1992? I can't explain it in any other way than a possible secret agreement (not known to minister Parys) between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Defense, which granted control over arms trading and force reduction talks to people from military intelligence.

Is Majewski still an intelligence officer?

I didn't say that, but let me remind you that the process of verification within the military intelligence was nearly non-existent.

And what about the graduates of the MGIMO and Diplomatic Academy in Moscow?

While reviewing the Ministry's staff we realized that they occupied all the key positions in the critical points of the Ministry. They were the largest group and dominated all areas related in any way to national security. The negotiations in Vienna were completely dominated by MGIMO graduates. It is striking that every time MGIMO people and the military intelligence would clash, the MGIMO always won. (Both groups were striving for monopoly.) A large concentration of MGIMO people could be found in departments dealing with South America and Southeast Asia.

Why? Weren't they of secondary interest?

In the anti-Communist countries of Asia and South America the staff of the embassies of the Eastern Bloc countries was very limited because of their canon law of security. Because of the limited number of Soviet diplomats, every man who was "ours" in the embassies of "people's democracy" countries counted in intelligence activities.

What is happening with MGIMO graduates now?

There is an increase of new ones--and that is the most surprising. In the beginning of 1992 a quarter of all applicants for positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that means the future staff, were MGIMO graduates. Please don't accuse me of seeing a spy in every person who studied in Moscow. I would like to point out just one thing: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is an institution with departments handling sensitive issues. Therefore, decision makers have a responsibility to be overly cautious in this area.

But perhaps the "new generation" could be shaped from the start? A Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman said that about 80 percent of the directors of departments and 70 percent of deputy directors have been changed.

Indeed. The vice-director became the director and vice versa, but in a different department. The Director of the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs replaced the ambassador to the Philippines. Reports showed required changes in middle management in central offices and in the field because both, the ambassador and the director, were changed. But it was nothing more than stirring the same old soup. The more important and essential to security a department was, the slower the changes in management. In turn, the department that dealt with cultural exchanges and the department that handled Polonia matters were undergoing true transformation, getting new people; the Third Republic in full force!

Therefore, just like everywhere, the "Solidarity" people were given only the facade of a government, but the most important issues were still controlled by the old cadre?

There were a few times when new people came on board, but they were exceptions. Some of the departments that are essential to national security are still dominated by the "old system" even today.

You have to admit that a lot of ambassadors were changed. You may scowl at the number of Mazowiecki's friends but still, these are new people.

Indeed, 70 out of 90 ambassadors were recalled. Ambassadors in important Western capitals were changed soon after Mazowiecki came to power, even before changes within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took place. However, there is one substantial point to be noted: in today's diplomacy the ambassador does not personally play the key role. He may propose the policy, but the decisions are still made by the central office. In that case he must follow instructions and doesn't have any freedom in making decisions.

You suggest that changes in positions were like gifts given by Mazowiecki to his friends from the "Wiez" quarterly?

Perhaps in a few cases. It was more of giving a new image to an old system. The new ambassadors were subordinate to the old vice-ministers, e.g., Mr. Dziewanowski, the ambassador to the USA, was subordinate to Mr. Majewski and could not make a single move without his permission. In addition, the very same ambassadors who were under Mr. Majewski had to deal with the old personnel on the lower level. Only a select few, by reason of knowing Mazowiecki, were able to bring their own staff on board. This happened only after arguments with the personnel office. Most of the "Solidarity" ambassadors did not even have a chance to take their own staff with them. Only Dziewanowski brought a large group of his associates which crumbled away in time. Today the old cadre is quite well off in Washington. Just like some sort of pop-up doll that cannot be kept down.

And how was it in the other Eastern Bloc countries?

Different. For example, soon after the appointment of the new democratic government Havel recalled from Czech embassies all of the intelligence officers for a background check. In return the Czechs gained a good deal of credibility with the West.

Why Skubiszewski did not push for radical personnel changes--he also would have felt better in the company of new people?

When Skubiszewski visited Moscow for the first time and saw the Soviet Foreign Ministry building (a "palatial" monstrosity in the style of our Palace of Culture), he sighed in the presence of the Russians: "So many people work here, and to think, back home I have to do everything myself".

That is schizophrenic: Skubiszewski complains about his own inefficiency in the presence of Russians!

Maybe he just blurted it out without realizing the consequences of his remark. For me it meant nothing else but "I don't trust my own staff--they are foreign to me and, therefore, I do everything myself". This lack of decentralized competency is still present at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs today.

Was it perhaps better that Skubiszewski did everything by himself, since he did not change any of his staff?

There were, and still are, very negative consequences. I could have understood this sort of thinking in 1989, if Skubiszewski was all alone against the bureaucracy and the "round table" agreements were fully in effect. But why then later on was he still "doing everything by himself?" Why didn't he fire 90 percent of the existing staff? The picture of Polish diplomacy was painted by old system persons in high-level positions.

Did Western partners express astonishment in your presence about lack of changes within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

Many times, but never during official talks because it could have been taken as "interfering in our internal matters." That's why during lunches and dinners we would hear: "Why do you keep this Majewski?" I heard that question dozens of times from US officials.

Is your evaluation of the Ministry's of Foreign Affairs personnel policy of the past three years generally negative?

Yes. The least important things were changed, while the same people and structures were retained in departments that are really important, for example those related to the military, security, information and finances.

Yes. The least important things were changed, while the same people and structures were retained in departments that are really important, for example those related to the military, security, information and finances. In these departments people are decision makers. The

Ministry of Foreign Affairs was, perhaps, the only office where the cabinet director was never replaced. The facade and emblem were changed, but the steel claws of the old system stayed the same.

DUBYNIN'S LEGACY

Skubiszewski was avoiding any radical changes, but then he plucked you away from the "New Coalition," a publication that was predicting the collapse of the USSR?

Skubiszewski was keen on establishing relations with the elite who advocated sovereignty in Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus and avoiding conflict in case of disintegration in the East. This policy was supportive of the collapse of the USSR. We promoted such a policy in the "New Coalition." By the end of March 1990 Skubiszewski and Mazowiecki were acquainted with my secret memorandum on the need for a two-track policy towards the East. I was right on time. Soon, the two-track policy was approved. I ended up in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (where I took over Kulski's responsibilities, although this was a lower ranking position) in order to implement the new policy. In such a hostile and strange environment I had easy access to Skubiszewski who gave me a green light to change one hundred percent of the staff in the European Department.

Where did Skubiszewski's far-sightedness come from? First he slavishly holds on to the round table agreements, and then he suddenly predicts the collapse of the USSR?

Skubiszewski did not identify Russia with the USSR. This duality was based on initiating relations with the independence movements of the individual republics, while maintaining relations with Soviet Center. This policy, initiated in June 1990, definitely emerged because of the domestic situation in Poland.

Lech Walesa and progress?

Exactly. Changes in Mazowiecki's Eastern policy came about after Walesa's emergence as a presidential candidate. The first warning for Mazowiecki's followers was Walesa's discussion with Soviet Ambassador Brovikov. At that time "Lech" demanded the withdrawal of Soviet forces.

The reaction of Government Spokeswoman Niezabitowska on behalf of Mazowiecki was impetuous. Niezabitowska publicly mocked: "We believe that Walesa indeed will do everything he can to bring about the withdrawal of forces", suggesting that he is a dummy who is incapable of getting anything done.

Yes, but Mazowiecki had correctly evaluated this lesson. After serious reflection he took the initiative. That's why he decided to negotiate the withdrawal of Soviet forces and agreed on Skubiszewski's two-track policy as mentioned before. A constant stimulus for Mazowiecki was the "harbinger" promoted by Walesa's camp in the newspaper Solidarity Weekly. That paper was proclaiming that we were not doing anything in regard to the East.

Would Mazowiecki, without pressure from the Walesa camp, still have tried to "rescue" us from the Germans with submission to USSR?

Democracy worked. Mazowiecki assumed that the majority of voters wished that the Soviets would leave.

Was the two-track policy effective?

Yes. It reached its culmination point during Skubiszewski's October visit to Moscow, both the capital of the USSR and the capital of Russia which was aspiring to independence. He also visited Ukraine and Belarus. The driver assigned to Skubiszewski spent a long time looking for the "building" of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Finally, the delegation landed in some inconspicuous apartment house. The declarations signed there were the first international documents endorsed by Russia. Baker used to visit only the Kremlin at that time.

But that's exactly the time when Walesa's camp was most strongly attacking Skubiszewski for its lack of a policy towards the East?

This was that awful paradox of Skubiszewski. At that time Poland had a real policy towards the East, which was closely watched by the West. At first the Americans were astounded by our concepts, but later, when the USSR was ripping apart at the seams, they adopted the very same concepts as well. This was the Polish contribution to world politics. It was discussed in Bonn or Washington more often than in Warsaw.

This way Mazowiecki was punished for his delay in demanding the withdrawal of the Soviet forces. Nobody trusted him anymore.

True enough. The first negotiations began when the government felt Walesa's breath on their backs. To give you one example, earlier, the government financial circles, to include Balcerowicz, gave thought only to changing the financial arrangements of the Soviet presence in order to stop supplementing the expense of their stay. And whether the forces would stay or leave seemed to make little difference to them, as long as they paid well. I call it the econocentrism, that is, a predominance of economic concerns over national security concerns.

Adjusting the iron collar?

To be more exact, lining it with the flannel of hard currency. But even then, we in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs understood that until there was no deadline for the withdrawal of the Soviet forces--the adjustment of the rules of their presence was a minor issue. I knew that the date of withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Poland had to be much earlier than their withdrawal from Germany. Poland had to behave like a sovereign state, and not some strategic playing field between Russia and Germany. I suggested the end of 1991. Skubiszewski was surprised (at such an early date), but after a minute of thought, he agreed. Mazowiecki ratified the date. Jaruzelski was informed about the decision without being consulted.

Did Jaruzelski have any say on this issue?

They treated him like air--the presidential campaign was in full swing.

When did the Russians find out about the date?

On September 7th, 1990, the new Soviet ambassador visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in my presence Skubiszewski presented him with a note calling for immediate talks on the withdrawal of forces. Skubiszewski mentioned the date of December 31, 1991. I was watching Kashlev to see his reaction: did he already know the date or not?

And what?

He didn't flinch. He wasn't a bit surprised at such short notice.

And then what happened?

There was silence for a month. Then, during Skubiszewski's visit to Moscow (October 11, 1990) Shevarnadze [Soviet Foreign Minister] agreed to talks in November. This was the beginning of a delaying game which certainly didn't help Mazowiecki in his presidential campaign. The November talks contributed nothing.

Were the Soviets helping Walesa?!

During the December round of talks (which were conducted every mid-month, alternating between Moscow and Warsaw) the Soviets stated that the withdrawal of their forces from Poland was a part of the process of withdrawing the forces from Germany. That's exactly what we were trying to avoid. The Soviets wanted it to be their autonomous, strategic decision.

Precisely, how did the Soviets say it?

One of the generals stated: "The USSR has already signed an agreement with the Germans regarding transit through Poland, and Poland should honor it". As the head of the Polish delegation I had to deliver almost a pre-school triviality: "Poland is a sovereign state and is not bound by deals done without its participation". The Soviet delegation clearly had difficulties in understanding what I had said.

Nevertheless, there is a certain tradition of Soviet-German pacts concerning Polish matters. When did finally something move?

Only after we announced to the Russians that if we didn't work out an agreement with a date advantageous for us, Poland would not allow the withdrawal transports to pass through from Germany. Shortly after, on January 1st, 1991, the first troops were supposed to begin movement by trains.

January came and what happened?

The Russians were playing the waiting game and decided to test us, whether we were indeed as tough [as we were saying] or only faking it. Soviet trains loaded with equipment and troops began to appear on the western border checkpoints before the January series of negotiations. We stopped these trains. It was a power struggle. The Soviet side was trying to trick us: some of the military trains were marked as civilian trains. One of them even managed to slip through into central Poland and was stopped near Kutno, where a forgery was discovered.

Was the train returned?

No, because it was closer to the Eastern border, but we sent a very angry objection. This taught us to tighten control [at the checkpoints]. We did not hold supply trains, and families were allowed to pass through, but tanks were not.

The public didn't know anything about this unequal battle of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Why?

We were busy carrying out the policies, not just talking about them.

Bravo. And what happened next?

During the January round of talks the Russians tried to intimidate us. General Dubynin delivered a statement which in fact was cocky talk with a repetitive theme: "The invincible and proud Soviet Army, which defeated the Germans in the past, will leave Poland when it deems suitable, using roads and routes it deems suitable, under waving flags, and in the manner it chooses. And if anyone tries to prevent our Army from doing so--we will not take responsibility for the safety of Polish people". Before Dubynin finished the last word, and before I could say anything, the head of the Russian delegation immediately disavowed this statement by announcing that it was General Dubynin's private opinion.

How did Dubynin react?

He did not comment. If it had not been for Ambassador Koptieltsev's [chief Soviet negotiator] action, I would have immediately broken off the dialogue.

Did Dubynin want to break it off?

He wanted to make a scandal. The text of this statement immediately appeared in the Soviet military newspaper in Poland and was delivered by Soviet couriers to the editorial offices of Polish newspapers. Zycie Warszawy forwarded this package to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Was it possible to consider Dubynin a persona non grata?

Dubynin, as the representative of the government of the USSR for Soviet forces stationed in Poland, held a very special status, but of course every country can expel anybody who is not a citizen of that country. Such a petition was drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was blocked by Belvedere [the Polish White House].

Did the round of talks where Dubynin made his speech take place in Moscow?

Yes. His swagger and saber-rattling were not accidental. We were coming back from Moscow on a special plane and had planned for a mid-point refueling in Vilnius. Suddenly, already in the air, the pilots received a directive to fly without the stopover: fly to Warsaw on the reserve fuel and, in an emergency, land in Minsk. We were looking at the lights of Vilnius at night from 8 thousand meters. We didn't find out until we reached Warsaw that the first casualties of the Soviet intervention had fallen there. That was it--the armed return of the Soviet forces to Lithuania and Dubynin's announcement that they would do in Poland whatever they wanted--he wanted to show us who was really in charge. The Soviet army was in charge. Dubynin knew that there would be a massacre in Vilnius and used us to heighten the atmosphere of threat around Lithuanian events.

Did he succeed?

Not in the beginning. The Russians realized that we were determined and would not let any trains pass through Poland. During the February round of talks, Ambassador Koptieltsev announced that the Soviet side was willing to discuss the withdrawal of forces by mid-1994.

That is a distant date!

But this was an important breakthrough.

What do you mean by that?

The Russians had started talking about a specific date. Previously they had insisted that it was a matter related to the withdrawal from Germany, but they did not specify how. For example, they could leave Germany first and then think about whether they should withdraw from Poland. We were afraid of a situation where there wouldn't be any Soviet forces anywhere in the world, but in Poland certainly, yes, there would be. And to top this off, no definite date for their withdrawal would exist. Besides, the Soviets could count on the Polish Left which not only through articles by Mr. Bojko and the pages of and Gazeta Wyborcza was saying that it was not surprising that the Soviets were so slow in talking to us, since they themselves were having a hard time getting used to the idea of not being stationed in Poland, because they had been stationed here for the past 300 years, etc.

The Russians were saying the middle of 1994, and we were saying the end of 1991. A difference of 30 months!

Yes, but we had reached a qualitative breakthrough, and that was mainly due to the uncompromising transit blockade. Poland's decisive and sovereign actions supported by factual proof that it was not all a bluff, brought a concrete result. And that's how foreign policy should be done.

Is it worthwhile to be sovereign?

Of course. Poland took advantage of its key location in Europe. The fact that we are between Russia and Germany was not a disadvantage at all. It is difficult to pass around us, and that is exactly why our interests must be considered.

Trains were standing idle, but the date was far off. What was the next move?

I prepared a memorandum for the National Security Council [Rada Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego] in which I recommended maintaining the blockade of the transports until the Soviets accepted a date that would be convenient for us. In addition--and this was the next move--I proposed making this issue multi-lateral, that is to take it to an international forum, such as the UN, the CSCE, and also to other influential organizations of which we are not members, e.g., NATO. I proposed exactly the same thing that the Baltic states had been doing very effectively in 1992. Skubiszewski took the proposal to the National Security Council [RBN], and then there was dead silence.

And why was that?

For a long time I wasn't able to find out what happened there. The whole issue was kept in strict confidence. Skubiszewski proposed a plan for new actions in order to strike while the iron was hot. But Jacek Merkel, the minister for National Security, gave a speech about the need to make concessions towards the USSR.

Was the subsequent dismissal of Merkel connected to this in any way?

I don't think so. Merkel's pro-Soviet and anti-independence attitude was not his own initiative--he was conveying Walesa's viewpoint.

THE PRESIDENT'S EASTERN LEG (THE CIS)

Walesa's viewpoint? The very same Walesa who in January of 1990 had given Soviet Ambassador Brovikov a dressing-down and ordered the Red Army to get out?

The same.

We remember the discussion with Brovikov all too well. It was the tone the Poles had been waiting for.

It's interesting what an echo effect the meeting on January 18, 1990 had. Walesa was apparently already thinking about the presidential campaign.

He definitely was thinking about it.

Walesa's anti-Sovietism at that time was clearly a useful tool in the presidential campaign. It was tactical, verbal and superficial. Walesa made four demands during the talks with Brovikov: the withdrawal of the Soviet forces; disclosure of the truth about Katyn; the right for displaced persons to visit the old lands, and; compensation for the victims of repatriation. Of all of these,

only the first demand was related to actual national interests. The rest had to do with history, propaganda and a list of sentiments, which could just as well have been formulated by a sclerotic starost of the interwar Luck county [now in Ukraine--translator], rather than being a real political challenge. To be sure, these were important demands but they should never have been either the primary or even secondary demands of someone aspiring to become head of state.

But everyone was saying: "Lech" will chase the Russkis.

Astonishing that Walesa himself said almost anything about the policy towards the East. Instead, everybody remembered only that one-time meeting with Brovikov. Walesa's camp was speaking for him, there were articles by Wyszowski and Maziarski in Solidarity Weekly, but there was no statement from Walesa himself. It was like dealing with two speeding trains: Lech Walesa gradually toning down his anti-Soviet rhetoric from one direction, and Mazowiecki's late departure from the other direction. Both trains passed each other in the summer of 1990.

But people had more confidence in Walesa? Did you also?

Yes. I supported Walesa. That's why I watched the Russian tactics with amazement: in the autumn of 1990 Mazowiecki was anxious to commence talks on the withdrawal of Soviet forces. And Moscow stalled! Why was Moscow acting in favor of Walesa, thus weakening Mazowiecki at the same time? Why were the Russians acting against their own interests when it was a known fact that Walesa would be more of an anti-Soviet president? Today I have the impression that Russia may have been better informed than Polish voters about Walesa's intentions towards the East.

How does Walesa view the East?

Walesa was convinced that Russia and the USSR were the same. Gentlemen, do you remember Walesa's inaugural speech right after he was sworn in? While talking about Poland's neighbors he did not use the term USSR, but Russia instead.

That portion of the speech was written by Wyszowski in a pro-Russian spirit, meaning an anti-Soviet spirit at that time. Seeing what was going on, Wyszowski soon withdrew from the "Gdansk assault force".

Right. Faced with reporter's questions as to whether Poland no longer borders with USSR, Belvedere and MSZ spokesmen prepared a statement to the effect that Walesa was thinking of the USSR when he said "Russia", because that shortened form is often used by US presidents, for example.

So, the spirit was almost pro-Soviet and anti-Russian?

Of course. Fortunately I was able to block this announcement at the MSZ. It would really have worsened our relations with the pro-independence elite in the Soviet nations.

Contrary to the interpretations, it was impossible to stop the episode?

Exactly. Kashlev was the first ambassador to meet with the newly sworn-in President Walesa. Besides the witnesses from the Belvedere, there were no other witnesses during the discussion on December 28, 1990, not even the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and that is formally and essentially not permissible because the newly elected head of the country has a right not to be informed about international affairs.

Wait, after all, Walesa himself talked to US Ambassador Simons earlier, right after the first round of presidential elections. Why do you attach so much weight to the meeting with Kashlev?

The two weeks that separate these talks is the period of time that separates the winner of the first round, who is waiting for the second round, from the President who was sworn in and in the office. Ambassador Ciosek came from Moscow to see Walesa around New Year's.

This meeting is missing from the press diary of the President's office...

Ciosek arrived without prior notification, not to mention the Minister's approval. In May of 1990 Skubiszewski approved the arrangements to replace Ciosek they were just waiting for the new president (Jaruzelski could have vetoed the change). Retaining Ciosek in Moscow was cited by Walesa's supporters as an example of Skubiszewski's politics of preserving the relics of the Polish People's Republic. And here Ciosek talked to Walesa as if nothing had happened, again without the presence of anyone from the MSZ (which was definitely breaking the rules). Of course, as had been rightly expected, he achieved the prolongation of his post in Moscow. He has been there ever since.

Did Skubiszewski himself expect to be dismissed?

He gave that impression, and had even stated so publicly, i.e., during a meeting in the Polish Institute of International Affairs [PISM] shortly before the elections: "I am going back to scientific work". The old system was at the height of its defensiveness at that time. After Walesa's victory his rhetoric of de-communization was being taken seriously. But we, in turn, "the new people in the MSZ", were dreaming that someone would shake up this building.

"Shake it up"?

Instead of completion the changes in January of 1991, there was a regress: Skubiszewski remained as Minister, and no changes in the management of the MSZ took place between January and the fall of 1991. The old system survived the shake-up and started to regain its previous splendor. Hope for changes, all the liveliness and gossiping--all of this stopped.

And Walesa's camp?

They dwelled in their dreams, supported by their own echo. By the end of December 1990 and in January 1991, people from Walesa's circle were writing: "Now this decaying Skubiszewski will definitely be out; soon we will recognize Lithuania." Meanwhile Walesa himself was carrying out different politics: Saying that Landsbergis is not a partner for him, Walesa refused to sign

even a non-binding letter to Landsbergis. He reacted with similar caution to the Soviet invasion of Lithuania. I remember the excitement within the staff of the President's Office, the staff that had been inherited from Jaruzelski. Some of them wanted to climb on the new boss' bandwagon and hoped that the declared anti-Sovietism would help them. Some ancient gentleman, from Bierut times, came to the MSZ at the beginning of January asking the MSZ to establish guidelines for steps to formally recognize the independence of Lithuania. The funniest thing is that this man didn't know that he could have been given the boot for that. He was acting contrary to the President's line, although nobody knew it yet. No one in Walesa's camp knew Lech Walesa's political intentions towards the East.

Including Bielecki?

Of course. Bielecki dashed off his endorsement of the decision to block the Soviet passage, didn't he? Carried along by his own momentum he acted in support of the independence. This momentum did not last very long.

What could have happened to Walesa at the beginning of the new year?

It's difficult to say. The fact is that the platform for the policy towards the East took shape at that time.

Would you please summarize this platform in one appropriate word?

" Finlandization."

SELLING OUR INDEPENDENCE TOGETHER WITH OUR POTATOES

You said that for a very long time you were unable to find out what took place during the meeting of the National Security Council on February 15, 1991. Why?

It was like keeping a corpse in the closet. Right after the initial success in the negotiations with Soviets, the Minister of Foreign Affairs came up with the idea of making Polish efforts more dynamic while at the same time (!) the Minister for National Security from the Office of the President delivered a report on the importance of concessions regarding the withdrawal of the Soviet forces. Belvedere intervened when we were at our peak.

What were the consequences of Merkel's [Minister for National Security] report?

The back of the active Polish politics towards the East had been broken. On February 26, 1991 during a pause in the Budapest proceedings of the Warsaw Pact Committee Advisory Committee, Skubiszewski, on behalf of Poland, offered to Marshal Yazov and to Bessmyertrnych, chief of Soviet diplomacy, to ease the blockade of the withdrawal transit from Germany.

That is unbelievable.

Skubiszewski was hoping for their support on the issue of the date of withdrawal. We acted like a partner with good intentions towards a partner with even better intentions. But in reality we were dealing with people who were not considering any compromises and who wanted to pursue shamelessly their own interests and who would listen only to real arguments. We had the initiative before, but now we adopted the rule of one-sided concessions, hoping for mercy from the other side (at a time when there was no pressure on us from anybody, and when we were quite successful). This was a complete turn-around in Polish politics.

Did Skubiszewski abandon without any dissent the policy of which he just beginning to feel convinced?

I didn't notice any objections on his part.

In the beginning of 1991 Skubiszewski launched his efforts to become UN Secretary General. Did that have any significance?

Yes. His efforts to move in to the chair of the UN boss lasted until the UN elections in October 1991. Skubiszewski was trying to reconcile his own election campaign with his job as the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs. And it is important to mention that one cannot become the UN Secretary General without the support of all the permanent members of the Security Council, to include the USSR...

How did the Russians react to the easing of the blockade?

They decided on a small gift for Poland. The Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Army, General Moiseev, came to Poland in March and corrected the date for the withdrawal of Soviet Forces from mid-1994 to the end of 1993.

So, our concessions did accomplish something after all?

Nothing could be further from the truth. Russians simply felt the effects of denying them passage [through Poland]. Although in February Skubiszewski announced the lifting of the blockade, the trains didn't start rolling, and Soviet problems were piling up. The detour via sea was too expensive and was not yet organized. They were trying to encourage the Polish side to accept further compromises.

If moving the date of withdrawal to half a year earlier was not a success, then what was the success?

We could have been successful if Moiseev had brought us a date much closer to the one we had set. The difference between mid-1994 and the end of 1993 was merely technical. Furthermore, it was dangerous for Poland to accept any offers from Moiseev. This was an attempt to set a standard for Soviet-Polish relations whereby no one else but the Soviet army would carry out the policy towards Poland.

So, who was supposed to handle the policy?

The Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was in our own interest to maintain the position that the withdrawal of [Soviet] forces was a political issue and a matter of our sovereignty. Therefore, if it is a political matter, then it falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Meanwhile, Moiseev did not mention the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at all. In short, his position could be summarized as "I, General Moiseev, represent those who are the real decision makers, and that's why I can graciously give you half a year more than those from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

In other words, was this one of those rare times when talks were conducted with the real decision maker--the Soviet army?

Yes, but the result was that although Moiseev brought us a date which was half a year earlier, in the end this was a date which the Soviet side would no longer change. The negotiations had practically ended and the rest was just a matter of technical details. Moiseev had simply announced their decision.

How was it then that the Russians began the withdrawal of their units from Boryn Sulinow as early as March? How did it come to that?

Suddenly, at the end of March, for no reason whatsoever, Dubynin informed the representative of the Polish government that the Soviet army would begin the ceremonial withdrawal on April 7-8 and that the President, Prime Minister, all saints, and the political bureau were invited. The pre-written script they sent to us contained such gems as "Throngs of people are saying farewell to the departing troops", as if this were the conclusion of one of Brezhnev's visits to East Germany. The government experienced some consternation as to how to react to this.

Wasn't that exactly what the Russians wanted to accomplish?

No, something else. On another occasion Dubynin had announced that they were withdrawing because, despite their good intentions, it is impossible to come to an agreement with the Polish government. Here we come with heartfelt intentions, and the Polish Government maliciously makes it impossible to reach an agreement.

Therefore, the inborn Bolshevism prompted Dubynin to interpret the concession made by the Poles in February as a sign of weakness.

Yes, and that the Russians have to continue on the same forceful path.

How did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs react?

If that's what the Russians want to do--by all means. Our involvement was limited to a few officials, nothing fancy, no crowd or similar festive touches. However, in the meantime, on April 2, 1991, Prime Minister Bielecki went to Moscow.

What for?

His trip to Moscow was nothing more than a performance intended to tempt using economic illusions. Preparations for this trip took an entire...day. In addition, on the side, Makarczyk and Vice-Minister Kvitsinskiy had agreed that in order to save face for the Polish Government they would announce that the withdrawal of Soviet forces was based on an inter-governmental agreement. Soon enough we found out how "good" the verbal agreements with the Soviets are.

Was the announcement ever made?

No. Kvitsinskiy made only a verbal declaration. Makarczyk went to the Soviet garrison at Borne Sulinowo on April 7th, since this was an inter-governmental agreement he, of course, wanted to add some clout to the ceremonies. And what did Dubynin do? During the ceremonies he announced that this operation was exclusively the decision of the Soviet Army as a sign of good will. Right there, to our face, he disavowed the verbal agreement between Makarczyk and Kvitsinskiy and began his propaganda again.

Did Makarczyk let them fool him?

Makarczyk's efforts to persuade the Soviet government to disavow Dubynin's statement lasted another two months. He did not succeed.

Of course, why should they give in to the loser...

Exactly. The April and May rounds of talks were only a game to cause further delays. The Russians realized that Poland was weak, was backing away from its positions and was not making any new moves, and therefore, the Russians had no reason to hurry. This emaciation of the Polish line of negotiations led, as it usually happens, to a breakthrough, one in which we ended up the losers.

What do you mean by that?

Before the June round [of talks] in Warsaw I heard from one of my superiors, actually from Vice-Minister Makarczyk, words so shocking that to this day I can't think about it calmly: "During the next round of talks we will have to make a lot of concessions so that we can get the agreement on the troop withdrawal signed. The government needs a success in order for the Liberals to win the elections."

Wasn't Makarczyk close to the [Democratic] Union rather than to the Liberals?

That is why he did not hide that he was just conveying the words of the government leaders. Unique is the fact that the Liberals thought they could win elections by making more concessions towards the Soviets. Their idea of the level of "Finlandization" of the society is unique. Based on that they wanted to win.

But isn't it really the other way around? The liberals themselves are "Finlandized". It is sufficient to recall their statement from the time of the coup [in Moscow]. Did Makarczyk accept the time frame proposed by Moscow?

Yes, he accepted the date of the end of 1993 during the June round of talks. This was a different Makarczyk then the one from the beginning of the talks.

...who was telling all the media that we "negotiated" to get the end of 1993 instead of mid-1994.

While we all knew that we received the mid-1993 date from Moseev when he brought this decision with him, so that he could stop playing diplomacy games. The Polish government capitulated to Soviets in June.

But you continued to participate in those negotiations?

I stepped down in the first half of July. I couldn't continue to conduct talks [with the Soviets] after such a major concession on the part of our government. The agreement on the withdrawal of the [Soviet] forces was finally signed by Walesa in May 1992, but the date of the ultimate departure of the Russians did not change.

Do you consider our surrender a diplomatic mistake?

Yes. All diplomatic tactics are aimed at working out a compromise. But the method of compromise is not effective with a negotiating partner that is uncompromising. It would make sense only if we would employ other mechanisms of pressure. There were neither multi-lateral nor unilateral efforts to firm up Poland's position. There was nothing. The talks became barren after we made our concessions. It is very rare that a sovereign subject would accept another side's terms without any bargaining on such a vital issue. I don't think that anyone in the USA would ever sign a one-sided agreement with the Soviets on disarmament just to win the elections.

However, should we irritate the Russians and lose the sense of reality, etc.?

Well, then why not sign up for the Commonwealth of the Independent States so just like Konrad Wallenrod we could destroy them from the inside! There is a monstrous logic in this. That's why people say that we are small and weak, in order to justify from the beginning why we won't be able to accomplish much, and that this is why we have to make various concessions--permanent, hasty, and every other kind. If one does everything to become dependent and to yield to everyone, then why even worry about becoming stronger with the help of NATO, the West, the CSCE, etc. This is an irresistible logic of vassalism and of auto-satellitism.

But wasn't it the economic motivation that was crucial in this development, that is, if we keep "making noise" then we will lose our export markets, lose the supply of oil and so on?

For every politician, basic security interests, including independence, must take absolute priority over economic interests, because a country with limited sovereignty and weak security is unable to defend any of its interests, including the economic ones. Such arguments are also camouflage for the catastrophic mindset and consciousness of our political leaders. Many people simply wanted to sell Poland's sovereignty together with its potatoes. They want to do this (although

they don't say so aloud) and their thinking is that we have to give up our independence so that the Soviets will buy our potatoes.

Who thinks this way?

For example Ciosek. He would dangle before the government of Mazowiecki and Bielecki the prospects of the huge business Poland could conduct with the Soviet Union in exchange for political concessions and especially for close ties with the Soviets. Therefore, we are supposed to "Finlandize" in exchange for privileges in trade and investments, or even for a prominent place in the plans of the gigantic Western economic assistance for Moscow, which would pass through Poland. Poland was supposed to be able to tap in to this assistance.

The idea of Polish-Soviet joint ventures on former military bases represents an extreme example of this thinking. When did this thinking arise?

It first appeared during Bielecki's previously mentioned visit to Moscow in April 1991. The Soviets proposed creating Polish-Soviet companies on abandoned bases. Bielecki listened to their proposal but did not accept. He brought the proposal to Warsaw. In the report that I created with Makarczyk, we opposed this idea very strongly and pointed out the dangers to Polish security. Bielecki rejected the Soviet proposal. I have a high regard for his wisdom. The idea resurfaced a few months after the coup. I learned of this by coincidence from a Soviet newspaper which quoted General Grachev: "Poland agrees to joint companies at airports and in other places." Our Ministry of Foreign Affairs was concealing this affair.

How can one be sure that joint ventures on former [military] bases would become intelligence centers?

It is sufficient to recall Szalajda, who suddenly emerged as the boss of a company which was just being established at the Soviet airport in Legnica. Szalajda was Vice-Minister for Economic Affairs in Rakowski's government and a famous person, but the government conducted a deeper inquiry into who on the Soviet and Polish side creates such ventures, and there were no doubts anymore as to who those people are. Such a presence cannot be tolerated in places of strategic significance. Had it not been for the creation of a centrist-right government, the Polish-Soviet joint companies would have been included in the treaty on the withdrawal of [Soviet] forces. This could have created a legal and international basis for a permanent and unlimited Soviet presence in Poland. A presence of the worst kind: of the diversion-intelligence special services.

CIOSEK--THE HOPE OF POLISH DIPLOMACY

Did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs predict Yanayev's coup in Moscow?

No, just the opposite. From the end of 1990, through the first half of 1991 up until the coup, the influence of the Soviet conservative forces was on the rise. At the same time Ciosek was tightening his ties with Yanayev who had been vice-president of the USSR since the spring of 1991. This friendship, if based only on their college days, was getting tighter as the upcoming coup approached. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was flooded with the longest ever

cryptograms of notes taken during conversations between Ciosek and Yanayev while the two were drinking vodka in a dacha outside Moscow. Ciosek presented his special friendship with Yanayev as one of the chief hopes for the Polish policy towards the East.

But wasn't Skubiszewski supposed to replace Ciosek?

When I reminded him about this during a conversation at the MSZ he responded that he must first obtain Belvedere's acceptance. After several hours he made an English style announcement: "the issue is no longer under consideration for reasons originating outside of this building."

And how were our relations with Yeltsin?

He was definitely being ignored. In the spring 1991, before Yeltsin won the presidential elections in the Russian Federation, the MSZ submitted a request to Belvedere to invite Yeltsin to Poland. There was no reaction from Belvedere. Well, that was not a surprise: before the coup, Belvedere favored the pro-Soviet option, not to be confused with pro-Russian. Anyway, Yeltsin has yet to be in Poland to this day.

What was the MSZ's view on the coup?

The MSZ was out of the game. The game was being played at Belvedere. President Walesa's reaction was very depressing: his waiting for the outcome, his belief that the old system was winning, his psychological acceptance of the new, even more "Finlandized" relations with Moscow. This is the only explanation for the obsequious address that Walesa had already prepared for Yanayev. From what I understand, Bielecki played a very positive role in this event by convincing Walesa not to send it.

Who was the author of the telegram to Yanayev: Walesa himself, Wachowski or was it Ciosek?

Ciosek was in Crimea when the coup began, and it took him surprisingly long to return, even Walesa criticized him for that. I also know his wire messages from Moscow--pure small talk. So, it was either Walesa or Wachowski because Skubiszewski would never propose something equally unwise. Political decisions were made in Walesa's circles. If we consider Wachowski as the number one man in this circle, then Admiral Kolodziejczyk was number two.

Then perhaps was it Kolodziejczyk? The Soviet Union collapsed after the coup. Did anyone try to take advantage of this historic occasion?

It was an ideal moment to obtain an earlier date of withdrawal of the Soviet forces and a historic opportunity to raise Polish-Russian relations to a new, non-Finlandized level.

And what came of it?

Just the opposite. In a live TV discussion with Gorbachev, Walesa stated that "we will not take advantage of the situation and try to humiliate the Soviet Army." On its own initiative and in the

words of its own president, Poland behaved like a whipped mongrel. We wasted a great opportunity, and we offered to sustain the imperial presence of the Soviet military on our own territory! By the way it appeared that the idea ultimately rejected by Bielecki about the joint venture companies on Soviet bases had returned after the coup.

Nations of the former USSR began declaring their independence after the coup. Did we take advantage of these circumstances?

Unfortunately, the two-track policy which we adopted in 1990 died at the beginning of 1991. Our relations with Ukraine and Byelorussia would look entirely different today if we had followed through with this policy. Our trips to Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn which were to rejuvenate the diplomatic relations between Poland and the Baltic states were too late to impress anyone. Diplomats from the entire world were already paying visits there.

Why did [Poland] wait so long to recognize Ukraine?

In early September of 1991 I formulated the proposal to recognize Ukraine immediately, but Skubiszewski declined this proposal. Desperate, I established personal contact with Bielecki because he was to receive the Ukrainian delegation on August 6th. During the plenary session I handed Bielecki the proposal to recognize Ukraine's independence. I saw that the Ukrainians were surprised that the Poles were exchanging and reading some documents instead of listening to the speech of one of the Ukrainian diplomats. After a brief moment Bielecki announced that Poland would publicly recognize Ukraine. Soon after, we did. Poland was the first country in the World to recognize the independent Ukraine.

SKUBI'S SHORT REACH

After rejecting the Soviet partnership companies and then withholding the telegram to Yanayev, wasn't this Bielecki's third positive move in the policy towards the East?

Yes.

Therefore, Bielecki made even more positive moves than Skubiszewski did in his entire political career?

Don't exaggerate. We are talking only about failures, but there was, after all, the Visegrad Triangle. The Triangle was one of the most significant attempts made by Poland and other countries of this region to pull out from the so called political East. The dogma of the Soviet politics of imperialism was to "atomize" the nations of the Eastern bloc. Officially, the Soviets declared friendship but at the same time they fed the antagonisms between the tenants of the individual "barracks." At the end of 1990, the Soviet diplomacy offered new treaties to its former satellites.

That happened when the Kremlin was being taken over by conservatives and Shevardnadze was supposed to leave office soon?

The Soviets were interested in nations of the Warsaw Pact (they were not concerned with Finland). The Hungarians were the first to receive this proposal in the fall of 1990. We knew that similar proposals would reach us as well. During a conference in Prague at the end of December 1990, I suggested that Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary should agree on a common stand on security issues instead of waiting for the Soviet proposal. This would be a concentration of power, rather than the "atomization", which would be advantageous for Russia. The Czechs and Hungarians approved the proposal immediately. This was certainly a burning issue because provisions proposed by the Russians were disturbing.

Please go on...

In their draft they proposed preventing any country from entering into any alliances which could threaten the security of the USSR. In addition, the Russians wanted to have the exclusive right to interpret what does or does not constitute a threat for them. In a previous draft they included a prohibition of any activities which could threaten the security of the USSR, including intelligence cooperation with foreign countries. There was also a clause which would prohibit the stationing of foreign troops on the territory of a signatory country, and in the case of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland--a ban on making former Soviet bases available to foreign armed forces. There was also a statement about the right of free passage which, if we were to sign it, could result in having two million Red Army troops show up with this paper on the Polish border and demand passage. At the end there was an entry about scientific cooperation which would cut us off forever from Western technology.

And we rejected all of that thanks to solidarity of the Triangle?

Yes. There were very few sovereign acts in the Polish foreign policy of post-1989. We benefited from this one which took place while Mazowiecki was still in office. Also Bulgaria, under the influence of the Triangle, refused to sign the contract. Romania, which was led by post-Communists was the only country that accepted the Russian demands on security issues--in this case, the Russians signed the agreement with their own agents.

Is it true that Walesa was clearly reluctant to sign the agreement on the Visegrad Triangle?

Walesa did not want the Triangle at all. He torpedoed the date of the first summit in Visegrad, and with difficulty agreed to the second. Rumors were coming from Belvedere that, for example, Walesa does not want to be seen with Havel because Havel was not a serious president. Meanwhile, it was only due to the cooperation of the Visegrad Triangle countries that it was possible to dissolve the Warsaw Pact so quickly after the Visegrad summit. One of the brightest moments of Skubiszewski career was when he decided with Prague and Budapest on this action. It was precisely the Triangle that paralyzed the first attempt to "Finlandize" Central Europe by means of treaties.

Were there any other attempts?

All of the subject-matter experts agree that the break-up of Czechoslovakia was the result of such activities.

Therefore, is Meciar's post-Communist Slovakia, like Poland, de facto in danger of getting stuck in the Eastern orbit, while the Czech Republic and Hungary will advance moderately towards the West?

That kind of threat is becoming more and more real.

Did five months of Olszewski's administration attempt to halt the processes of "Finlandization?"

Yes. And it was an attempt that was effective in several important areas. Our membership in NATO became one of the goals of the government. The government made sure that there were no "Finlandizing" elements in the treaty on our relations with Russia. And, finally, his cabinet prevented a treaty-based Soviet presence in Poland.

How did it happen that Olszewski had to send a message to Moscow in order to veto Article 7a (on joint ventures) of the treaty with Russia? Why didn't he cross that point out while in Warsaw?

The treaty on the basis for Russian-Polish relations was developed between Belvedere and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Olszewski was ignored in this process. Only after very strong intervention did the Prime Minister receive the text of the treaty from Skubiszewski. During a special meeting Walesa sort of agreed to cross out Article 7a, but right before his departure to Moscow, Drzycimski stated something different. A telegram was sent in order to clarify the situation.

Walesa did delete Article 7a from the treaty, but soon after that he hosted Dubynin at Belvedere and talked about expanding cooperation "not only on the former bases." What was the matter there?

That was an attempt to implement the former position despite a momentary failure. He failed in a treaty, but he was hoping to succeed in real life. Even though Olszewski removed that article from the treaty, a treaty can always be broken.

Why did Olszewski not remove Skubiszewski after these incidents?

He recognized that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was Walesa's domain.

And Skubiszewski--why did he so easily lose his style?

I don't know. Anybody who remembers the old "Skubi" would be depressed. His relations with Mazowiecki were different. The Premier was the boss, but they were partners. When Walesa came along, it only took him half a year to make Skubiszewski into the executor of his whims. Earlier, until mid-1990 there were some positive elements in him, sometimes even spell-binding ones, like the two-track policy or the Visegrad Triangle. The policies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were growing worse over time. Fewer initiatives. A flickering out. An inertness. Things

are starting to cool. By the end of 1991, I couldn't take the MSZ anymore. The MSZ was a dying institution.

Did you get punished for your "prank" of recognizing Ukraine's independence?

On December 1, 1991, I left the European Department and took charge of Department for Planning and Analysis. I was only waiting for a new government, hoping for a new boss of the ministry.

The new government delivered Skubiszewski to MSZ...

Furthermore, his position was so strong that he erased from the draft of Olszewski's expose the sentence on Poland's aspirations for NATO membership.

Did Skubiszewski censor the Prime Minister's expose?

He was at liberty to do that. They begged him to enter the government, and he had very strong backing from Walesa.

As I see it, Skubiszewski seems to have a unique intellect but weak character. Under favorable conditions he is an independent and creative politician, but under pressure he is submissive and carries out politics of others.

This is a very accurate description, but I feel sad saying that about a person with whom I worked for a very long time.

1995: WELCOME TO HARD TIMES

We have been talking mainly about the policy towards the East. Does that policy contain any elements of Poland's overall foreign policy of the past three years?

The most striking characteristic was the sluggishness in breaking ground for the pro-NATO concept. This obvious necessity became official only two and a half years after Solidarity came to power, a month after Olszewski came to office. As late as the fall 1991 I read a document written by Andrzej Towpik, the Director of the Department of European Institutes (completely dominated by MGIMO) in which he tried to show that Poland should not strive for ties to NATO that would be any closer than Romanian or Russian ties to NATO, since this would destabilize the situation in the East. Parys, after taking over the Ministry of National Defense, was the biggest promoter of the slogan "closer to NATO."

You said that Skubiszewski removed from the Prime Minister's expose the sentence on our course towards NATO. When did Olszewski announce the pro-NATO option?

In January 1992, during a meeting of the Military Council of the Ministry of National Defense. There again Skubiszewski resisted. After I became Director of the Planning and Analysis Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in one of my proposals I included a plan for

closer relations with NATO--Skubiszewski crossed it out again. Only after heavy pressure from the rest of the government did he accept this option. But that was already March 1992...

And Olszewski was not going to stay in power for much longer.

Another characteristic of the past three years has been "econocentrism". The "econocentrism" is not a direct result of the round table talks, rather, it is the result of Russian approval of them.

Poland was supposed to adopt the "Finnish model": limited autonomy but a free market economy, right?

Yes. Mazowiecki talked about formalizing economic relations with the West and the EC but never about NATO. He was careful not to talk about alliances, security, new weapons--only about money. To this day such thinking persists in caricature form.

For example?

For example, the foreign policy in Walesa's speeches. What is this? Something that would give us more loans, credits and investments? The issue of joint ventures is a perfect example to show that "econocentrism" may lead to irresponsible ideas. These partnerships were presented as hens that lay golden eggs. In the spring of 1991 we were just one step away from endorsing the bloc structure of the neo-Council for Mutual Economic Aid. That was when there was still the lingering notion that we should not formulate a clear Western option because doing so would cause us to miss out on supposedly incredible economic advantages.

Where did these mirages come from?

From an unclear vision of what Poland's final position in Europe and in the World should be. This is a one more characteristic of our foreign policy.

The Czechs, for example, in contrast to the Slovaks, opted for the West a long time ago.

The Czechs, after the "velvet divorce", will become the leader in the march toward the West. They will even outpace Hungary, where the pro-Western option was chosen by their own nomenklatura which happened to be slightly more enlightened than ours.

Perhaps the situation is different? In 1990 Skubiszewski said: "Our status is the same as Sweden's, and we don't need anything else."

Skubiszewski is wrong. Poland has not achieved the same status as Sweden for the simple reason of having Soviet forces on its territory and, therefore, the West will always treat us as penetrated, as quasi-dependent on Russia, or even as an area to which Russians have a justified right. Nobody in the West treats Sweden in this way. Furthermore, even Sweden's position, although we don't have it, would not be sufficient for us.

Sweden lies on the outskirts of Europe while Poland is located where confrontations occur over geostrategic interests. Balancing is impossible. Poland must choose one side: either the East or the West. We have been experiencing the "advantages" of the Eastern option for the past 50 years, so we are left with pro-Western option. The notion that we want to be another Sweden is illusive and, therefore, dangerous.

Then maybe we are at least a "second Finland"?

We are in much worse position than Finland, which just "de-Finlandized" itself. Finland signed new agreements with Russia, free from any clauses that would limit its sovereignty. And the US immediately accepted Finland as its partner in military cooperation! Now the Finns are completing a contract to purchase American F-16 fighters with the latest technology. The West still includes Poland in the category of friendly enemy. Three years after Solidarity came to power we are still on the COCOM list, the organization of highly developed countries that controls the flow of technology, especially to the post-Communist countries. We hold second-rate status in the Western world due to our half-communist administration, unclear ties with the East and the presence of the Soviet army. Because of that we won't get any strategic weapons that are on the COCOM restriction list. Hungary has been removed from that list, they are already on the other side of the iron curtain.

What is the source of the weakness in Polish politics?

The source lies in our worst trait: passivity. With the exception of the two-track policy and the "Triangle", we have not tried to shape this part of Europe. Instead of taking advantage of our key geostrategic location, we are waiting, like a petitioner, for an initiative from the West.

History teaches us that this location is fatal.

Our location could be our trump card. We should be the initiator and leader of Central European politics--naturally with some restraint. So far our only success was the politics of the "Triangle" which really was our contribution (it was Havel's idea, but he didn't know how to implement it). A big country with an extraordinary history is showing a startling lack of political initiative. We are at the stage where there is now danger to our sovereignty, but the level of danger is not increasing on a daily basis. At least not yet. Around 1995 the level of threat will rise considerably. We must change our policy immediately.

Why this particular date?

Right now Poland has its own "window of opportunity," a unique historical chance, but only for a limited time. Our independence became possible due to the crisis and collapse of the Soviet Union. The positive times began in the fall of 1989, and it increased even more with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The opportunity will end when Russia regains its own identity in a new situation.

And when will that be?

The process has already begun. The Russian economy may still be on the verge of collapse, and there are still no signs of improvement, but the worst period in Russia's politics is already past. The process of transforming the Commonwealth of Independent States into a new form of state has already started. It has already been announced that the Russians will normalize their relations with Belarus, and Belarus is a strategic corridor to Poland. Once again Russia is beginning to establish a modus vivendi with the West. The imperial Ministry of Defense is being rebuilt with a leadership made up of generals from Afghanistan. Yeltsin's replacement is another "Afghanet", Air Force General Alexander Rutskoy. General Dubynin (who died unexpectedly on November 22, 1992--Editor) publicly stated in *Zycie Warszawy* (Jun. 13/14, 92) that Poland should not rely on uncertain relations with NATO, and instead he invites Poland and the Polish Armed Forces to participation in the armed forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Finns' blood would boil if Dubynin would ever try to make such a statement in Helsinki. This statement did not even arouse any interest in our media.

We don't remember such a statement.

The same as you don't notice the rebuilding of Russia's relations with the West, particularly with the USA. These relations are being rebuilt on the bases of bipolarity and based on the stereotype that in reality there are only two important superpowers in the world, Russia and America, which control the entire world. The geostrategic cooperation is making its comeback, i.e., "global defense system against ballistic missiles." Clinton will win the elections (the interview was conducted in August of 1992) and the dominant trend among Democrats is to isolate America from international problems. This trend is especially disturbing for Central Europeans.

Even if Clinton wins the elections, the Republicans may return to power in 1996.

Clinton's success will be the symbol of deep changes for which the United States has been ready for a long time. American politics have been evolving for some time now. Americans are truly decreasing their military involvement in Europe. The process of reducing the US forces in Europe to the officially planned 155,000 troops will be completed in 1994. (Soon after the elections, Clinton mentioned an additional reduction by another 50 thousand.--Editors.) The Congress is talking about bringing the total number of US forces in Europe to under 100,000.

But additional forces can be quickly brought over from across the ocean.

Yes, but the reality is that their presence is decreasing. The complete withdrawal of the Canadian forces in the spring of 1992 received no comments in Poland. If Canada can do this, then that is how people are thinking on that side of the ocean, i.e., that involvement in Europe may be limited to political involvement. But political involvement alone is not enough. Furthermore, elite circles in the US as well as in the American society in general are leaning towards a less active role in Europe. What will happen if the Clinton administration reduces the American presence in Europe to zero or to a symbolic number somewhere on the periphery of Europe, i.e., in England or Spain but not in Central Europe or Germany?

The Soviet dream scenario would come true: we [Soviets] will leave Germany only when the Americans leave Germany.

And we are going to delude ourselves in Poland that we are a second Sweden and don't need to join NATO. For the past decades the Soviet scenario has been to allow the Germans to unify in exchange for their neutralization. Something that was unthinkable two years ago could soon become a reality.

You are guessing, but please go on...

Perhaps not in 1995, but certainly in the 90s the "Eurostate" will be formed with its capital in Brussels. We may end up outside that pact, but Russia is not worried about that.

Can you finally explain why the Polish "window of opportunity" will close in 1995?

The withdrawal of the Russian forces from Germany will be completed by December 31, 1994. The Germans will gain real freedom in foreign policy. Until that time politicians from the Adenauer or Brandt schools may lose ground unless they "outbid the extreme Right. In order to stay in mainstream politics the political class will adjust to accommodate the street nationalism. The neo-nazi incidents did not emerge without reason.

Recently a movement has appeared which declares itself to be the heir to the German Democratic Republic...

The former GDR is already influencing all of German political life. It's sufficient to recall how Prussia mentally dominated the united Germany after 1870.

All right, would you now please bring that corpse out of the closet: it is the eve of 1994...

There are no Americans left in Europe, there is an integrated European Union (those from the East who did not make it in on time--their loss), the superpower Russia has been rebuilt, the Germans are strongly accentuating their interests in Poland. All of these processes reinforce each other. The conclusion is clear: either 1995 will be the last year of Poland's "window of opportunity", or it will be the last year of our chances for any change. We have to finish building our independence by the end of 1994--after that we may lose a lot.

Then what should we do?

So far, no one has managed to interfere with our domestic affairs. This is a great moment when we can create and choose any government and any system we wish, when we can elect whomever we wish. This is a unique moment and it won't last much longer if we don't build a strong state. If we lose, we will only have ourselves to blame. The Polish drama lies on the level of consciousness of our political elite. What portion of Polish society understands what this independence means and what the possibility of losing it means? A small portion. The trend towards independence does not have strong support in its own society. This is a drama but not yet a tragedy.

You talk a little bit like a stricken prophet.

I have been talking only about the facts, on which I base a rational forecast. Poland has been fighting for its sovereignty since the second half of 1989. This fight is different from the one in 1920, but the stakes are similar. Society is unaware of this war, and that is why society is incapable of mobilizing itself in the fight against inaction, or against the helplessness of that part of the elite which is going to lose this war. Even the voices that say there is such a war are barely breaking through to public opinion. This is a sign of a "Finlandized" public opinion, like treating such fears as a sort of "stupefaction." The front line is constantly moving, and both sides are winning partial victories. The Soviets have forced their presence here to the end of 1993, but we on the other hand have won by not having their treaty-based presence on former bases after that date. These are only examples. This conflict is still far from over, and now is the time to act. President Lech Walesa's political line since the beginning of his term has been an obstacle in Poland's path to regain its independence. I am saying this with the bitterness of someone who voted for him.

The year 1995 will also be the year of the next presidential elections. But you are saying that this will be too late?

It won't be too late if Lech Walesa leaves before then or if his political line changes radically.

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